

An Analysis of Romeo and Juliet (1)

Ikuta Rieko

Introduction

Shakespeare used Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet* as a source of his *Romeo and Juliet*. He, with his skill and talent, changed and transformed it into a much better, well-constructed play. The principal changes are (1) the compression of time: Shakespeare shortened Brooke's nine months into four days. The tragic love begins on Sunday and ends at the dawn on Thursday with the lovers' death. (2) Changes and development on the characters: especially Mercutio is given a much more important part by Shakespeare. (3) Juliet is made younger: Brooke's is 16 years old but Shakespeare's is not yet 14. (4) Shakespeare begins his play with the Prologue changed into a much more refined sonnet than Brooke's.

How the play begins is very important for the whole play. It decides the atmosphere of the play. For example, *Hamlet* begins with the famous question, "Who's there?" This symbolizes some ambiguity prevailing in the play and gives us a hint that there is something hidden under the surface and we, the audience, prepare ourselves for the mysterious development that we don't know what may happen at the next moment. The beginning also presents the frame of the play, like The Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew*. How about *Romeo and Juliet*? Geoffrey Bullough explains it well, "Like Brooke he begins with a sonnet, for the Chorus Prologue is a sonnet of Shakespearian pattern (Brooke's Argument is Italianate). Whereas Brooke tells the main details of his plot, Shakespeare presents the general 'public' outline and the tone of his story."⁽¹⁾ The 'tone' is the

atmosphere or mood and it is composed of various motifs and images which build up the main theme, the leitmotif. Then, how does the play begin ? How does it convey its 'tone' ?

THE PROLOGUE⁽²⁾

Enter Chorus.

Two households, both alike in dignity,
 In fair Verona where we lay our scene,
 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
 Whose misadventure'd piteous overthrows
 Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
 The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
 And the continuance of their parents' rage,
 Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
 The which if you with patient ears attend,
 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend

Here in the 14 lines, three motifs are presented. One is 'fortune' or 'fate'. Another is 'death'. And the second is 'strife' which means every state expressed by the word antagonism. The first motif is read from the words, 'fatal', 'star-cross'd', 'misadventure'd' (which means unfortunate), and 'death-mark'd' (=destined). The second is represented in the words, 'death', 'overthrows', 'bury', 'death-marke'd', 'children's end', and 'remove' (whose meaning is almost the same as 'die and bury'). The third motif is seen in the words, 'grudge', 'mutiny', 'foes', 'strife', and 'rage'. The image of 'blood', by which 'civil hands' are made 'unclean' in 'fair Verona', suggests how violent the antagonism is. The word 'fair' and 'civil' are stained 'unclean' by the 'blood' shed as the result of the fight. The first and the second motifs are closely connected with the words, 'love'. The words are; 'star-

cross'd lovers' and 'death-marked love'. The chorus informs that the play is about a tragic love of the lovers who are destined to death because their families have been fighting since the old times. They can't choose but die to fulfil their love, for they are born from the two 'foes' and this is their fate. It is clear that the leitmotif is their tragic love. How are these motifs are related each other and used to modify the leitmotif throughout the play? This is studied and analyzed in Part I. In Part II, various images or imagery and factors modifying these 'molitf's, such as one significant image, 'hand', and one factor 'time', both of which appear in the Prologue, are precisely examined.

PART I

Chapter I the Motif 'death'

-----How 'love' is related with 'death'.

The next two charts show the number of the word 'love(ed)' used in each drama.⁽²⁾

(1)	<i>Richard II</i>	29	2750 lines
	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	104	2114
	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	146	2785
	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	171	2189

(2)	<i>Hamlet</i>	73	3796 lines
	<i>King Lear</i>	59	2913
	<i>Othello</i>	96	3472
	<i>Macbeth</i>	24	2064

The four plays in the first chart were written by Shakespeare almost at the same period. Those in the second chart are the famous four tragedies. *Richard II* is a history play, which depicts the usurpation of the throne and King Richard II himself. The four tragedies focus on the protagonist's

actions and states of mind, that is, Hamlet, Lear, Othello, and Macbeth themselves. Their love is one aspect of the plays. The three plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* take up 'love' as their main theme. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with all the trials and misunderstandings the four couples finally reconcile and get married. A tragic love is also shown in the play-in-the play, *Pyramus and Thisby*. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, two young men fight for one girl, Silvia, though the one man is engaged to another girl, Julia, but the play ends happily after various things happen, along with argument, sufferings and forgiveness. *Romeo and Juliet* focuses on the tragic love of the lovers. Considering the theme of the plays, it is a matter of course that these three plays have higher frequency of the word 'love' than the others. And it would be possible to say that if author has something specific to appeal to the audience, he or she uses the specific words or images or expressions more often for that purpose, whether consciously or not.

Then, how are the other 'love' compounds used in these 'love' -theme-plays? They will help specifying what type of dramas they are.

(1) love compound as an adjective

<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	love-devouring death, love-perfecting night
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	love-wounded Proteus

(2) expression, love's ~

<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	love's heralds, love's passion, love's shadows, love's transgression
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	love's forgetfulness, love's wings
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	love's mind, love's stories, love's tongue love's wound

(3) expressions, lover's ~ and ~ lover(s)

<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	star-cross'd lovers, unbound lover lover's tears, lover's eyes, lover's brains lover's tongues, lover's perjuries
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	notable lover, hot lover, youthful lover lover's staff (means hope), lover's hope
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	lover's flight, lover's food, lover's fee lover's grace

These 'love'-related words produce subtle difference among the plays. It is probably because *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy, and the other two are comedies which picture and stress love's positive side expressed by the words such as 'energies', 'hope', or 'grace'. *Romeo and Juliet* treats love's negative side reflected by 'death' or 'shadow'. It is also interesting that in *Romeo and Juliet*, physical parts are connected with 'love', such as 'lover's eye'. This reminds us that the word 'hand' is symbolically used in the play.

How often do the words, death, die(d), dead appear in the plays, then ?

	dead	death	die(d)	total
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	6	7	3	16
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	14	13	13	40
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	38	69	25	132

Though these three plays deal with love, *Romeo and Juliet* has the greatest number of the ominous word 'death'. It is clear that in the play *Romeo and Juliet* 'death' plays an important part. The 'love-death' connection is its key thought, so even though only once it appears in the play the love-death related word, 'love-devouring death' could be said to carry something very important and meaningful for the whole play. Romeo mentions this particular word in Act II, vi, 11.3~8,

Rom. Amen, amen ! But come what sorrow can,

It cannot countervail the exchange of joy
 That one short minute gives me in her sight.
 Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
 Then love-devouring death do what he dare;
 It is enough I may but call her mine.

Romeo is waiting for Juliet to come to their secret wedding. Though the fulfilment of their love, marriage, is near at hand, he evokes 'sorrow', 'short' and 'death'. Ironically the last two lines prove to be true in Act V. They are married only for a short time — about two days' honey moon. Death waits and 'devour's their life, their love. Just after Romeo's lines, Friar Lawrence says;

Fri.L. These violent delights have violent ends,
 And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
 Which, as they kiss consume. (Act II, vi, 11.9~11)

Friar Lawrence reacts against Romeo's words and tries to give him a lesson that he should be moderate if he wants to cherish his love. He, however, reflects and echoes what Romeo's words ironically imply. 'Fire and Powder' connotes a flash of time, a short time. 'Triumph' means their marriage. They love each other 'violently' and they will die shortly after their marriage. The word 'consume' closely relate to 'die' and 'ends'. Without knowing, Friar Lawrence foretells Romeo and Juliet's fate. As Spurgeon analyzes, "Shakespeare saw the story, in its swift and tragic beauty, as an almost blinding flash of light, suddenly ignited, and as swiftly quenched."⁽⁴⁾

Romeo and Juliet first meet on Sunday night and they meet their death at dawn of Thursday. How do the words 'death' and 'love' appear according the time sequence ?

time	incidents	love	death
SUNDAY (Act I scene i ~ Act II, ii)	Fight between the Capulets and the Montagues → The Capulets' party, (the first encounter of Romeo and Juliet) → The famous Balcony scene (their first love-vow)	68	6
MONDAY (II, iii ~ III, iv)	Romeo's confession to Friar Lawrence about his love towards Juliet → Their marriage → Fight (Tybalt kills Mercutio. Romeo kills Tybalt) → Romeo's banishment	40	20
TUESDAY (III, v ~ IV, iii)	Romeo and Juliet's parting → Friar Lawrence gives Juliet some medicine she drinks it and pretends to be dead.	17	13
WEDNESDAY THURSDAY (IV, iv ~ End)	Discovery of Juliet's death → Romeo goes back to Juliet → their death → Reconciliation of the two families	18	20

It is quite natural that from their first encounter until the marriage, the number of the word 'love' is greater than after the marriage. Meanwhile, the word 'death' appear after their marriage in greater number. It looks like 'death' steals up behind 'love'. The 'death' image haunts. This close relation between the two words 'love' and 'death' is traced back in the sonnet Prologue. The incidents of this chart shows that the fight and the murder on Monday just after the marriage foreshadow their sad parting and tragic death. Here comes another motif 'strife', which induces the destruction of their love, that is, death.

Chapter II the Motif 'strife'

-----Does 'strife' really cause their death ?

As soon as the Prologue ends, there appear the servants of the two families, the Capulets and the Montagues. They begin fighting after some provocative remarks. Then Benvolio from the Montagues and Tybalt from the Capulets appear. Benvolio tries to stop the fight, but Tybalt seems to enjoy it. He says,

Tyb. What, drawn, and talk of peace ! I hate the word,
As I hate hell, all montagues and thee. (I, i, II., 68~69)

He repeats 'hate' twice. He is stimulated by 'hate'. His motivation is 'hate'. Benvolio, as well as citizens are entangled in the fight. Without Tybalt's hate, the fight may have stopped. It is true that there is antagonism, or strife between the two families, but without some inducement, there can't be a fight. The inducing factor is 'hate'. It causes fighting and drives people to death. This will become clearer if the usage of the word 'hate' is scrutinized. The next chart shows the number of the word;

	hate(d)
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	13
<i>A Mid summer Night's Dream</i>	16
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	9
<i>Richard II</i>	15

The number is almost the same. Considering the small number, 'hate' is unlikely to give so strong impression as 'death' or 'love'. How and in what case is the word 'hate' used in *Romeo and Juliet* ? Tybalt's 'hate' quoted above is the first one. This is closely linked with fight. It is the particular force that moves forward and makes the fight more violent. How about the others ?

- 1) *Prin.* Cast by their grave beseeeming ornaments
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Canker'd with peace, to part your canker'd hate.
(I, i, 91~93)
- 2) *Rom.* Here's much to do with hate, but more with love
Why then, O brawling love ! O loving hate ! (I, i, 173~174)
- 3) *Jul.* My only love sprung from my only hate ! (I, v. 136)
- 4) *Rom.* My life were better ended by their hate
Than death prorogued wanting of thy love. (II, ii, 77~78)
- 5) *Prin.* I have an interest in your hate's proceeding (III, i, 185)
- 6) *Fri.L.* And slay thy lady that in thy life lives,
By doing damned hate upon thyself ? (III, iii, 117~118)
- 7) *Jul.* It shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate,
Rather than Paris. (III, v, 122~123)
- 8) *Jul.* Proud can I never be of what I hate, (III, v, 148)
- 9) *Prin.* See what a scourge is laid upon your hate, (V, iii, 291)

There seems to be three types of 'hate'. One is opposition of love, which has nothing to do with 'strife' or 'mutiny'. Another is the opponent or antagonism and the other is a destructive force generated from the opponent relationship. The 'hate's in (2), (7) and (8) belong to the first type and the ones in (1), (3), (5) and (9) to the second type. Tybalt's hatred and (6) are in the third type. The (6) is quoted from Friar Lawrence's words. He criticizes Romeo's rash act, killing Tybalt for revenge. Romeo hates Tybalt and kills him. This 'hate' also kills love. Because of his hate he 'slays thy lady' (Juliet, his love). 'Hate' impels him to the destructive act. The same is true of Tybalt who is driven by hatred. Franklin M. Dickey explains about Tybalt, juxtaposing Old Capulet.

-----Shakespeare has made Tybalt not simply a man who acts rashly in sudden rage but the symbol of the will diseased with hatred, of fixed anger without limit.-----

Tybalt's second appearance is equally brief but even more ominous than the first. It is as if Shakespeare were husbanding the concentrated hate represented in Tybalt until the climactic moment which destines Romeo. Old Capulet, easily aroused to testy rage, does not hate.⁽⁵⁾

Tybalt's second appearance is at the Capulets' party, just after Romeo and Juliet's first romantic encounter. Tybalt's ominous words, "but this (Romeo's) intrusion shall, /Now seeming sweet, convert to bitt'rest gall." (I, i, 89~90) overshadow Romeo and Juliet's love which has just begun and makes it 'seeming sweet'. Their love is not sweet in reality. Unlike Tybalt, Old Capulet admits Romeo at his party, though he knows he is a Montague. So we could say that in this play, 'rage', 'strife', 'mutiny', and 'grudge' are not direct cause of the two murders; Mercutio's and Tybalt's. Only when 'hate' is aroused, they take a destructive course. 'Hate' is the trigger to the tragedy. If Romeo and Juliet were not from the two opposed families, Tybalt would not 'hate' him so much. Here comes another motif composing of their tragedy. It is their fate that they 'take their life from the fatal loins'.

Chapter III the Motif 'fate'

-----What does 'fate' mean ?

The third motif 'fate' is closely connected with the words 'fatal', 'fortune' and 'stars'. Precisely there are subtle differences in the meaning, but they are used almost in the same way. In the play they play a part as something that governs Romeo and Juliet's destiny. They become unfortunate because something fatal happens. The next chart shows the number of these words.

	fortune	fate	fatal	star(s)	total
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	9	1	4	7	21
<i>A Mid summer Night's Dream</i>	1	4	0	2	7
<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	9	0	0	3	12

The number is rather small, but even so *Romeo and Juliet* has greater number than the others. This shows that in *Romeo and Juliet* these words play a more important part than the other two. First, let's examine the word 'fate' and then the closely connected, 'fatal', 'fortune' and 'star(s)'.

1) 'fate'

Rom. This day's black fate on moe days doth depend;

This but begins the woe others must end. (III, i, 116~117)

Romeo utters these lines just after Benvolio informs him of Mercutio's death, for which Romeo is partly blamed. He tries to stop the fight between Tybalt and Mercutio, but 'underneath whose(his) arm/An envious thrust from Tybalt hit the life/Of stout Mercutio.' (III, i, 164~166). Mercutio's death is the turning point of this drama. From there the two lovers take a sorrowful path towards their death. The importance of the two lines is clear from the fact that they are rhymed by 'end'. Usually rhyming occurs at the end of each scene, so this rhyme means that there is *a pause* after the word 'end' to emphasize the significance of Romeo's words, and to show that the first half of the drama ends. From here on the 'woes' begin to fall on him, Juliet and others as foretold.

The word 'fate' appears only once, like 'love-devouring death', it conveys deep meaning.

2) 'fatal'

① *Ben.* -----I can discover all

The unlucky manage of this fatal brawl: (III, i, 139~140)

② *Ben* -----and, swifter than his tongue,

His agile arm beats down their fatal point

And 'twixt them rushes; (III, i, 162~164)

③ *Rom* and that the trunk may be discharg'd of breath

As violently as hasty powder fir'd

Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb (V, i, 63~65)

Benvolio's 'fatal brawl' is the very fight that results in the death of Mercutio and Tybalt. The 'their fatal points' means the blades of their swords which bring about not only their death but the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. If it were not for the fight, every thing would be settled peacefully by the marriage of Romeo and Juliet. We could expect a happy ending. In that sense the fight is fatal. It decides their 'black fate'. The word 'fatal' appears again in Romeo's words at the Apothecary. Hearing of Juliet's death, Romeo decides to kill himself with the poison. It is tragically ironical because Juliet is not dead really. He wishes for the poison which works 'violently' and quickly like 'powder fir'd'. These words remind us of Friar Lawrence's words in Act II scene vi, which begins with "these violent delights have violent ends", where he also uses the image of gun powder. The word 'fatal womb' echoes the 'fatal loin' in the Prologue. From his birth until his end the word 'fatal' clings to him. This is his fate.

It is clear that the word 'fate' influences the whole play through the word 'fatal'.

3) 'fortune'

① *Rom.* Ay, mine own fortune in my misery. (I, ii, 58)

② *Jul.* And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay, (II, ii, 147)

③ *Jul.* Hie to high fortune ! Honest nurse, farewell. (II, v, 78)

④ *Rom.* O, I am fortune's fool ! (III i 133)

⑤ *Jul.* O Fortune, Fortune ! all men call thee fickle.

If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him

That is renown'd for faith ? Be fickle, Fortune;

(III, v, 60~62)

⑥ *Cap.* A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender, (III, v, 185)

⑦ *Fri.L.* Unhappy fortune ! By my brotherhood,

The letter was not nice, but full of charge/Of dear import

(V, ii, 17~18)

By the first, the second and the third one, Romeo and Juliet intend to mean the 'fortune(s)' as good luck. The third means their marriage. The scene is where she is hurrying to Friar Lawrence to marry Romeo. But in the number four, the 'fortune' turns to bad luck. Romeo's fate is blackened because of the fight resulting in the death of Tybalt and Mercutio. The 'fortune' is, therefore, 'fickle' to Juliet. She thinks that if it is fickle, 'fortune' will change Romeo's bad luck into good and bring him back soon. So even if Old Capulet considers the marriage to Paris as a good fortune, good luck, this 'fortune' is a bad fortune to Juliet. The word 'fortune' finally changes its meaning, from 'fickle' to 'unhappy' in Friar Lawrence's words. When he understands that Romeo isn't aware of Juliet's fake death, he recognizes their fortune as 'unhappy'. According to the change of Romeo and Juliet's fate, the 'fortune' changes its meaning.

Though we have only two in number, 'misfortune' is important, too. The one is Mercutio's words, in Act I, iv, 91, "much misfortune bodes." It is interesting that soon after this Romeo utters his vague fear, using the word 'stars'. The other is Romeo's. "O, give me thy hand,/One writ with me in sour misfortune's book !" (ActV, iii, 82). He knows he is a 'fortune's fool' and Paris as well, who happens to meet Romeo on the very night.

4) 'star(s)'

- ① *Cap.* At my poor house look to behold this night
Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light.
(I, ii, 24~25)
- ② *Rom.* I fear, too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date (I, iv, 106~108)
- ③ *Rom.* Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes (II, ii, 15~16)
- ④ *Rom.* The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,
(II, ii, 19)

- ⑤ *Jul.* Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars, (III, ii, 21~22)
- ⑥ *Rom.* Is it e'en so? Then I defy you, stars. (V, i, 24)
- ⑦ *Rom.* Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.. (V, iii, 110~112)

The word 'star(s)' is used in two ways. In Number 1, 3, 4 and 5, its direct meaning is the stars shining brightly in the sky at night. In Number 2, 6 and 7, it means something fatal which leads and controls our destiny. Romeo's words in Number 2 are followed by the lines;

With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life clos'd in my breast,
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But He that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail ! (I, iv, 109~113)

Romeo utters these lines just before the Capulet's party. Expecting the 'revel', at the same time he fears that this is the beginning of the fearful date. He wishes 'He' (=God) will guide his course (destiny), but the steerage proves to be not 'He' but the 'stars' in which 'some consequence' is 'hanging'. Romeo utters Number 7 quotation just before he drinks the poison. The 'yoke of inauspicious stars' is his fate and the 'stars' 'direct' his 'sail', (=his course) to death. After this quotation, Romeo mentions the poison as 'desperate pilot' or 'unsavoury guide' whose 'conduct' is 'bitter'. (V, iii, 116~117). The 'bitterly' in Romeo's words in (I, iv, 107) is repeated. Romeo's fear becomes real and it is shown and stressed with the same imagery. Juliet is compared to 'stars', in Number 1, 3 and 4, because they shine beautifully and brightly above all things (or girls) for Old Capulet and Romeo. This positive, bright side of the image that the word 'stars' conveys changes into the negative meaning of the 'stars' that is fate closely linked with death. In Number 5 quotation, Juliet mentions Romeo's death. She wishes that he will be a little star after he dies. Considering the scene is a happy moment when she is expecting Romeo to come to her

chamber, that she thinks of the shadow of death is unsuitable. This is the effect caused by the fatal fight where Tybalt is killed by Romeo. From here until their death the image of fatal stars prevails in the play, as seen in Number 6 quotation.

These motifs are intermingled and sustain each other to make the drama of Romeo and Juliet's tragic love coherently beautiful and poetic. The motifs also consist of the smaller parts such as words, images and imagery constructed by them. In Part II, we will appreciate Shakespeare's genius again.

Notes;

- (1) For the quotation I used *William Shakespeare, the Complete Works* ed, by Peter Alexander, published by Collins in 1966.
- (2) For counting the number of the words I used John Bartlet, *A Complete Concordance to Shakespeare*, published by St. Matrin's Press in 1990.
- (3) Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Source of Shakespeare*, p. 278.
- (4) Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, p.312
- (5) Franklin M. Dickey, *Not Wisely but Too Well*, p.97

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